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## **SEVEN CRITICAL NEEDS OF VICTIMS LAW ENFORCEMENT MUST ADDRESS**

**Safety.** People who become victims of crime are generally at higher risk of being re-victimized. Law enforcement officers must protect victims from intimidation and educate them as to how to decrease their likelihood of re-victimization, thereby helping community members feel safer and more secure. Law enforcement should also work with residents to develop strategies to prevent them from being victimized the first time.

**Support.** Law enforcement needs to ensure that victims receive current and accurate referral information about victim service professionals whose role is to provide ongoing support and assistance.

**Information.** As first responders, law enforcement officers must provide victims with information about their rights and resources available to them as well as future points of contact within the criminal justice process. If a case moves forward, law enforcement should assist in keeping victims apprised of the status of the investigation and prosecution. In the event a case does not result in an arrest and prosecution, keeping the victim informed of the case status may serve as the only measure of available justice.

**Access.** Law enforcement agencies need to ensure that information is readily available in languages that represent the community's composition. Agencies should also attend to the special needs and circumstances of differently-abled victims, such as people with developmental or physical disability, diminished competency, or mental illness, by helping them to participate fully in the investigative process and access applicable supportive services.

**Continuity.** Law enforcement needs to collaborate with victim service providers and other criminal justice professionals to ensure that victims receive consistent information and support throughout their involvement with the justice system. This approach helps to avoid having a victim shuffled from one source of information to another.

**Voice.** Law enforcement needs to empower victims by encouraging them to ask questions and listening to their concerns. Inviting victims and victim advocates to participate in policymaking may ensure that policies and protocols effectively guide law enforcement to meeting victims' needs.

**Justice.** Law enforcement needs improve victims' sense of safety and well being by conducting thorough investigations, follow-ups, and doing their part to hold offenders accountable. Though justice is not always fully

achieved, victims who see law enforcement working in their best interests will feel safer and better served.

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## **GEORGIA'S EXPERIENCE IN COMBATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The state of Georgia defines domestic violence as an act of family violence. The law protects against physical, sexual, and emotional abuse among family members. You don't have to be married to someone in order to be a victim of domestic violence in Georgia

Georgia's Family Violence Act is a law designed to protect individuals who are abused by present or past spouses, parents of the same child, parents and children, stepparents and stepchildren, foster parents and foster children, or other persons living or formerly living in the same household. It can also be used to get temporary custody, financial support, and other assistance for the abused person. Additionally, victims that do not qualify under Georgia's Family Violence Act may seek protection pursuant to Georgia's stalking laws.

Domestic violence charges are treated very seriously in Georgia. The court can issue a Family Law Protective Order. This order prohibits the offender from having contact with the victim for a specified period of time. If a person is found to violate a restraining or protective order, he or she could be jailed and charged with a separate crime, including aggravated stalking.

A Family Violence Protection Order can: order an abuser to leave the victim alone; give the victim possession of the house and force the abuser to leave (you can ask the court to have the sheriff send someone home with you to enforce this part of the order); order assistance to help a victim get his or her personal property; make the abuser provide alternate housing for a spouse, former spouse, or parent and children; give the victim temporary custody of shared children and set temporary visitation rights;

award temporary child support and/or spousal support from the abuser; order the abuser to go to counseling; award costs and attorney's fees to either party; lead to the abuser's arrest if he or she breaks the order.

A protective order normally lasts 12 months. If you file a Motion before your Protective Order ends, the Court, after a hearing with you and the person who abused or stalked you, may give you a Three Year or Permanent Order.

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